Ibn Taimiyyah: The True Image

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Praise to the Lord of the Worlds and peace and blessings be upon the Seal of the Prophets and the Master of the Messengers, Abi Al-Qasem ***Muhammad*** *(SAWS) and upon his Holy Purified* ***Ahlulbayt*** *(AS).*

Having been asked by a few persons to provide a detailed explanation on why the Shia Imamis have a negative stance on 'Shaykhul Islam' Ibn Taimiyyah, we have provided the research carried out by Al-Ghadeer Center. This gives a brief a overview on why this man is viewed as an extremist and why his views were not only conflicting with Islam, but served to damage Islam through the adherence of a fanatical sect to his deviant ideas. There are many notable scholars, Shia and Sunni, who have denounced this man and published volumes on his bewildering thinking, but we shall be content to present the following work as suitable material to back our stance.

ShiaChat Team

1
Ibn Taimiyyah: A Brief Biography

His full name is Ahmed ibn Abdul Halim, ibn Abdul Salam, ibn Al-Khudhr, ibn Taimiyyah. He was born in 661 AH in Haran, a town in eastern Syria and died in Damascus' Citadel prison in 728 AH. The intelligent and quick-tempered Ibn Taimiyyah was imprisoned three times because of his beliefs and religious decrees. His celibacy was left unexplained by his biographers.

He authored several books on religious doctrines and theology. Many centuries after his death, the Wahhabi movement revived and endorsed his beliefs and opinions. These beliefs and viewpoints are discussed in the following sections.

2
Ibn Taimiyyah and the Prophet's sayings

It is pertinent to wonder whether the claim of Ibn Taymiyyah's followers that he was an authority on the Prophet's sayings was true or that his critics were correct in dismissing his approach with regard to these sayings as lacking in rigour and heavily biased. Neither evaluation of Ibn Taymiyyah's approach can be accepted or rejected at this point; final assessment must be deferred until available evidence have been reviewed and evaluated. This is the theme of the following parts.

On supplication by asking for the Prophet's intercession:

Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned a number of authentic sayings of the Prophet's companions in which they asked for his intercession such as the well-known supplication: "O Allah! I approach You through Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy. O Muhammad! I approach you through your Lord and mine through you, to bestow on me and my condition Your Mercy". According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the use of these supplications was confirmed by Al-Bayhaqi, Ibn Al-Sunni and Al-Tabarani. He also added that "Ibn Abi Dunia confirmed in his book *Majani Al-Dua'* the use of this intercession and similar ones by early Muslims. Ibn Hanbal has also reported in *Mansak Al-Mirwizi* asking for the Prophet's intercession in his supplication" [1].

Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote in the same book, *Al-Tawasil wa al-Wasila* that "none of the companions or early Muslims and indeed none of the Muslims asked the Prophet after his death to intercede on his behalf. They never asked him for anything! And none of the eminent Muslims scholars reported doing so in their books" [2].

This is bewildering since Ibn Taymiyyah himself mentioned later in his book that Ibn Abi Al-Dunia, Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Al-Sunni, Al-Bayhaqi and Al-Tabarani confirmed asking for the Prophet's intercession by early Muslims.

On visiting the Prophet's tomb and the tombs of other Prophets and pious persons:

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote: "An authentic saying by the Prophet on visiting his tomb or that of the Prophet Abraham can not be found" [3]. He also claimed that "all the sayings reported on the subject of visiting (the Prophet's) tomb are weak, and definitely conducted, and distinguished imams and scholars did not report any of them" [4]. However, he contradicts himself in the same book by reporting the following authentic saying of the Prophet from two sources, Ibn Maja and Al-Darqutni: "Whoever visits me after my death is as if he has visited me in my lifetime". Thus, evidence presented Ibn Taimiyyah himself serve to disprove his claim that such sayings by the Prophet have not been reported by leading authorities.

On the commentaries and the purposes of revelation:

Ibn Taimiyyah claimed that the account of Ali's giving his ring to a beggar during prayer is untrue according to a consensus of religious scholars [5]. There is no need to look for evidence disputing this claim further than the same book by Ibn Taimiyyah. In this book he highly praised the commentaries on the Qur'an by Muhammad Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari for verifying accounts reported by early Muslims and excluding those by unreliable sources. He paid the same tribute to Al-Baghawi's commentaries.

Ibn Taimiyyah must have known that Al-Tabari reported the account of Imam Ali's giving his ring to a beggar from five different authentic sources in interpreting the following verse [6]:

> ***"Your leader is Allah and His Messenger and those who believe; who say prayers and pay poor due while they are bowing down in prayer"***

Al-Baghawi also reported this account. Indeed, it can also be found in all books of commentaries such as those by Al-Zamakshari, Al-Razi, Abi Al-Sa'ud, Al-Nasfi, Al-Baidawi, Al-Qurtubi, Al-Suyyuti, Al-Shawkani, Al-Aloosi and Al-Wahidi in *Asbab Al-Nizool*.

On whether or not it is justified to curse Yazeed Ibn Muawiya:

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote that Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal was asked [7]:

> "Do you report Yazeed's accounts?"
> He replied: "No. Wasn't he responsible for what happened at Al-Hara's battle?"
> He was then told that some people say:
> "We adore Yazeed"
> To this he replied: "Can anyone who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement adore Yazeed?"
> His son, Salih, asked him: "Why don't you curse him?"
> Imam Ahmad answered: "And when did you hear your father cursing anybody"

This is the only part of Imam Ahmed's discourse on this subject reported by Ibn Taimiyyah. In the complete text, he condoned cursing Yazeed, according to Abu Al-Faraj Ibn Al-Jawzi [8]:

> Ahmed said: "Why not curse a person who has been cursed in the Qur'an!"
> He was asked: "And in which verse did Allah curse Yazeed?"
> In reply Ahmed read the following verse:
> 'Do you seek upon becoming leaders to do evil on this earth and to mistreat your kindred. Those are the ones cursed by Allah by making them deaf and blind (to the truth)'
> Ahmed added: "Is there an evil greater than murder?"

This case clearly illustrates Ibn Taimiyyah's lack of objectivity in reporting the Prophet's sayings when he accepted the sayings confirming his personal beliefs and rejected those contradicting them. Other examples of this biased approach are presented in the following sections.

3
Ibn Taimiyyah and Allah's attributes

Ibn Taimiyyah believed that all Allah's attributes mentioned in the Qur'an or the Prophet's sayings must be understood on the basis of their literal meanings without interpreting them. Accordingly, he maintained that "Allah resides upward in the heavens where He sits upon the throne occupying it completely. He descends to the lowest heaven and then ascends. He possesses organs such as eyes, hands and legs which are different from human and other creatures' organs" [9]. Ibn Taimiyyah also wrote: "Whoever interprets the meanings (of these verses) belittle Allah and do not comprehend him fully" [10].

The only evidence which Ibn Taimiyyah presented in defence of this belief was his claim that it was the belief of the Prophet's Companions and early Muslims. On this he wrote [11]:

> I read the commentaries of the Companions and the Prophet's sayings reported by the Companions and have studied more than one hundred books of commentaries and so far I have not come across a single account indicating that one of the Companions interpreted any of the verses or sayings on Allah's attributes contrary to their obvious, literal meanings.

This viewpoint was blindly endorsed by his followers without making an effort to check the books of commentaries which collected the Companions' views on the attributes' verses especially those highly acclaimed by Ibn Taimiyyah by Al-Tabari, Al-Baghawi and Ibn Atia.

These and other sources fully reported the standpoints of the Companions and early Muslims on interpreting the attributes' verses which diverged completely from the literal understanding of Ibn Taimiyyah and *Al-Hashawia*.

On the interpretation of the chair verse, Al-Tabari endorsed Ibn Abbas' interpretation of Allah's chair to mean His knowledge, and he supported this with evidence from the use of the term in Arabic. The same interpretation was reported by Al-Baghawi, Al-Shawkani citing Ibn Atia, Al-Qurtubi and others.

Similarly, widely accepted interpretations of the verses which refer to Allah's 'face' do not lend support to Ibn Taimiyyah's literal understanding of these verses. To illustrate, early Muslims interpreted the 'face' in the following verses to mean 'Himself':

> ***"All things perish except His face"*** [12]
> ***"But the face of your Lord will abide forever, in all its majesty and glory"*** [13]

Also the 'face' in the following verses was interpreted to mean favour or recompense:

> ***"And whatever you spend is in seeking Allah's face"*** [14]
> ***"Who for the sake of His face endure with fortitude"*** [15]
> ***"This is the best for those who strive to earn His face"*** [16]
> ***"The poor due you give for the sake of His face"*** [17]

"We feed you for the sake of His face" [18]
"And so shall be that does good works for the sake of His exalted face" [19]

These interpretations obviously contradict Ibn Taimiyyah's literal understanding which considered the face to be the usual human feature. The only exception in which he admitted that early Muslims interpreted the 'face' figuratively to mean the direction was the verse: "Whatever direction you face there is Allah's face". But he denied that this was an attribute's verse [20].

Ibn Taimiyyah defended his literal understanding of the Qur'anic reference to the 'face', 'eye' and 'hands' of Allah by falsely claiming that it was based on the views of the Companions and early Muslims. Needless to say, he failed to produce a single statement by any of the Companions in support of his allegation.

Although his books include no mention of his ideas on the corporeal nature of Allah, these ideas were reported by a number of reliable sources as follows:

1. Ibn Batuta and Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani confirmed that Ibn Taimiyyah said while delivering a sermon from the pulpit that Allah descends to the lowest heaven as I descend here and now [21].
2. Ibn Hayan reported in both of his commentaries on the Qur'an, *Al-Bahr Al-Muheet* and *Al-Nahr* that he read the following statement in Ibn Taimiyyah's *Kitab Al-Arsh* written in his own handwriting:

Allah sits on the Chair and he has left a space beside him for the Apostle of Allah.

However, this statement quoted by Yusuf Al-Nabhani in *Shawahid Al-Haq* [22] and also in *Kashf Al-Thunoon* [23] was omitted from the published version of Ibn Hayan's *Al-Nahr*, together with other statements on Ibn Taimiyyah's views. Regardless of this, Ibn Taimiyyah persistently defended these views without mentioning the seating of the Prophet with Allah on His throne in his book *Minhaj Al-Sunna* [24].

3. Ibn Taimiyyah claimed that raising the hands during supplication is proof that Allah resides upward [25]. If this reasoning is accepted then it can be argued that since a person performing prayer recites the Qur'anic verse: ***"I direct my face toward the One who created heavens and earth"***, it can be deduced that Allah is in the direction of the Qibla – Allah is exalted above such descriptions.

A distinguishing characteristic of the Arabic language in which the Qur'an was revealed is that the meaning of a word or a text may not be limited to its literal meaning. Thus when the following verse was revealed ***"Hold fast to the Rope of Allah, all of you together"*** [26] this was not understood as a reference to an actual rope. Otherwise, we must await a rope sent down to which we can hold fast.

The rope in this verse was interpreted to mean Islam, the Qur'an or the *Thuqalan*, i.e. the Qur'an and the Prophet's Household. Whoever disallows interpreting such terms is obviously ignorant of Arabic. And whoever claims that early Muslims did not interpret the verses on Allah's attributes is contradicting authentic accounts. One has only to scan available books of commentaries to prove that such interpretations exist.

4
Ibn Taimiyyah and the Prophet's Household

Members of the Prophet's Household occupy a distinguished and exalted position among Muslims conferred upon them by the Qur'an, the Prophet and all Muslims except those whose beliefs are incomplete.

In several of his books Ibn Taimiyyah presented evidence of the eminence of the Prophet's Household. Some of this evidence follows [27]:

1. Bani Hashim (the Prophet's clan) are the best of Quraish (his tribe) and Quraish is the best of all the Arabs. An authentic saying of the Prophet confirms this: 'Allah chose Bani Ismail, and chose Kinanah from Bani Ismail, and chose Quraish from Kinanah, and chose Bani Hashim from Quraish'.
2. Al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, is reported in the Traditions to have complained to the Prophet that a group of their Quriashi tribesmen divide them. To this the Prophet said: 'By the One who holds my life in His hand they shall not enter Paradise until they love you for Allah's sake and because you are my kin'.

Ibn Taimiyyah commented on this: "If they (the Prophet's Household) are the best of creation, then their deeds must also be the best".

After reviewing some of the evidence reported by Ibn Taimiyyah on the eminence of the Prophet's Household we turn to his views on them. These clear and unequivocal views can be summarised in the following points:

Siding with enemies of the Prophet's Household:

Ibn Taimiyyah openly took the side of opponents of the Prophet's Household. Not only did he strongly defend their adversaries with all his talents at polemics but he also dismissed authentic statements by the Prophet and distinguished Companions and early Muslims on the eminence of the Prophet's Household. His arguments on this topic also exhibit a blatant disregard of historical facts reported by numerous sources. He even stands accused of inventing and distorting evidence in support of his position.

His efforts in defence of enemies of the Household culminated in several works. A brief critical review of these works follows:

He wrote a book entitled *The virtues of Muawiya, Yazeed and that the latter must not be cursed*. The theme of the book obviously contradicts the consensus of early Muslims that none of the alleged Prophet's sayings on Muawiya's virtues are authentic. This was reported by Al-Hafidh Al-Thahabi from Ismail Ibn Rahawaihs who is considered to be of the rank of Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal in religious knowledge [28].

Al-Nisai wrote that when some citizens of Damascus asked him to prepare a book on the virtues of Muawiya, he told them: 'I know of no such virtues except what the Prophet said: 'May Allah never fill his stomach" [29].

The well-known theologian Al-Hassan Al-Basri is reported to have said regarding this [30]:

> Muawiya had four traits any of which could be considered a cardinal disobedience (of Islamic tenets): his usurpation of government in this nation by force and without consulting any one at the time when this nation included some companions and virtuous Muslims. (Second) His appointment of his son, Yazeed, as his successor despite the fact that he was a drunkard, wore silken clothes and played the drums. (Third) His claim that Ziyad was his half-brother which violated the Prophet's command on such matters. (Fourth) He murdered Hajar Ibn Udai and his associates, woe to him.

Numerous accounts of the transgressions of Muawiya were reported by Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Imams of the Prophet's Household, Ibn Abbas and the Companions Abi Thar, Ammar, Abada Ibn Al-Samit and others. Indeed, the proven transgressions of Muawiya and his associate Amr Ibn Al-A'as are sufficient to convict both of them deviating from Islam. But this did not deter Ibn Taimiyyah from defending both of them and Yazeed. In the case of the latter, he even invented and distorted accounts to defend him.

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote in his book *Ra's Al-Hussain* "Yazeed never showed approval of Al-Hussain's killing. On the contrary he was saddened by it" [31]. However, no evidence of this can be found in the writings of early Muslims. The consensus of early Muslims on this issue was reported by Al-Taftazi in his book *Sharh Al-Aka'id Al-Nafsia* as follows:

> They agreed on cursing the slayers of Al-Hussain, and whoever ordered it, permitted it or approved it.
> In truth, Yazeed's approval of the killing of Al-Hussain, his show of satisfaction with it and his rudeness to the Prophet's Household have been reported but what concerns us mostly is his heresy… May Allah curse him, and his associates and aides.

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote: "The carriage of Al-Hussain's severed head to Al-Sham at the time of Yazeed is unfounded". He also dismissed the accounts which describe Yazeed's stabbing of Al-Hussain's head with a stick [33].

It is crucial to ask if Ibn Taimiyyah based these conclusions on reliable sources. Among the sources he considered to be most reliable and knowledgeable in matters of religion are Al-Zubair Ibn Bakar, Muhammad Ibn Saad, Al-Baghawi and Ibn Abi Al-Dunia. All of these authorities, however, confirmed the account of the carriage of Al-Hussain's head to Syria and Yazeed's abuse of it with a stick which Ibn Taimiyyah disbelieved [34]. However, Ibn Taimiyyah referred to them in his attempt to evade the central issue [35]:

> All of those who collected Al-Hussain's account and his killing such as Ibn Abi

> Al-Dunia, Al-Baghawi and others never mentioned the carriage of (Al-Hussain's) head to Asqalan or Cairo.

This is typical of Ibn Taimiyyah's selective and biased use of historical facts.

Ibn Taimiyyah also wrote: "Yazeed did not verbally abuse Al-Hussain's family. On the contrary he was generous to them" [36]. In another book he wrote on the same event: "And none of the Prophet's Household (who accompanied Imam Al-Hussain) was taken prisoner, and none (of the women) were taken prisoner" [37].

This is another example of Ibn Taimiyyah's laboured and biased attempts to defend Yazeed against unquestionable evidence presented by none other than those recognised by Ibn Taimiyyah as thoroughly reliable such as Ibn Abi Al-Dunia and Muhammad Ibn Saad. After describing the killing of Al-Hussain and the looting of his clothes, sword and headdress they wrote: "And someone took Fatima's, Al-Hussain's daughter, shawl, another stole her jewels… Omar Ibn Saad dispatched Al-Hussain's head to Ubaidallah Ibn Ziad along with the women and children. When Zainab went past her slayed kin she cried: 'O Muhammad! Here lies Hussain, in the wilderness, blood-stained, his limbs severed… O Muhammad! Your daughters are taken prisoner and your descendants slayed, the wind blowing sand on them'. And neither friend nor foe could stop himself from crying… Ibn Ziad then appointed Zahar Ibn Qais to carry the heads of Al-Hussain and his partisans to Yazeed.

At that time, Yazeed's messenger arrived with an order for Ubaidallah Ibn Ziad to send Al-Hussain's caravan and surviving members of his family. (After their arrival in Damascus) Yazeed sent after Ali Ibn Al-Hussain, and the women and children who were bound with ropes. Ali Ibn Al-Hussain addressed Yazeed: How do you think Allah's messenger would react if he saw us bound with ropes? Yazeed then ordered the women and children be seated… A Syrian stood up and said: Prince of faithful grant me her – pointing at Fatima Bint Al-Hussain. She was terrified, thinking that this could happen. She clutched her aunt Zainab's dress. Zainab said: You lie! It is not for either of you to do that. Yazeed was angry and replied: You lie. I can do it if I so wish. And she said: No! Allah would not allow it unless you abandon our faith and profess another religion. Yazeed then dispatched them to Al-Medina" [38].

This account has been reported by all historians [39] with the exception of Ibn Taimiyyah.

His rejection of their exalted position:

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote profusely on this subject. Excerpts from these writings are included here. Before doing that, evidence attesting to the high status of the Households of all Prophets and especially those of Prophet Muhammad will be presented.

Allah says regarding the Household of Abraham [40]:

> ***"May Allah's blessings and mercy be upon you, people of the Household. Glorious is He, and worthy of praise".***

In another chapter and after naming 18 Prophets, He says [41]:

> ***"All of these We exalted above Our creatures, as We exalted some of their fathers, their children and their brothers. We chose them and guided them to a straight path".***

Allah also informs us in the Qur'an [42]:

> ***"Allah exalted Adam and Noah, Abraham's descendants and the descendants of Imran above all His creatures. They were the offspring of one another".***

And with regard to Prophet Abraham, Allah says [43]:

> ***"We… bestowed on his descendants prophethood and the Book".***

And similarly [44]:

> ***"We gave him Isaac and then Jacob for a grandson; and we made each a righteous man. We ordained them leaders to guide mankind by Our command".***

On the Prophet Muhammad's Household, Allah says [45]:

> ***"Allah seeks to keep uncleanness from you, the Ahlulbayt and to purify you thoroughly".***

And also [46]:

> ***"Say: For this I demand of you no recompense except love for my kindred".***

The Prophet was reported to have said regarding Ali, Fatima, Al-Hassan and Al-Hussain [47]:

> O Allah. Those are my Household. Keep uncleanness away from them and purify them thoroughly.

And when the following verse was revealed [48]:

> ***"Allah and His angels bless the Prophet. All you who believe: Call for divine blessings on him and salute him with a becoming salutation".***

The Companions asked the Prophet: How shall we call blessing on you, Messenger of Allah? He replied:

> Say: O Allah bless Muhammad and Muhammad's Household as you have blessed Abraham and Abraham's Household…

The Prophet is also reported to have said [49]:

I am leaving with you the Thaqalayn (two great things): Allah's Book and my Household.

Ibn Taimiyyah, however, dismissed all this evidence and endorsed the following viewpoint [50]:

> The idea of exalting the Prophet's Household is a legacy of the Pre-Islam period when the households of chieftains occupied the highest positions.

Similarly, Allah exaltation of the Households of Prophets and Messengers and choosing from among them leaders and imams must also be regarded as such by Ibn Taimiyyah. By taking this stand, Ibn Taimiyyah contradicted basic religious tenets and ridiculed the Qur'an and the Tradition.

His attempts to defend his personal viewpoints regarding the status of the Prophet's Household did not stop at this. Thus, he accepted that when the following verse was revealed: "Allah seeks to keep away uncleanness from you, the Ahlulbayt and to purify you thoroughly", the Prophet summoned Ali, Fatima and their sons Al-Hassan and Al-Hussain and after covering them with a cloth said:

> "O Allah. They are my Household. Keep uncleanness away from them and purify them thoroughly".

But he argued that did not grant the Prophet's Household any distinction because "it is a mere supplication by the Prophet for the purification of his Household and did not mean that Allah has indeed purified them" [51].

Ibn Taimiyyah also rejected that the following two verses referred to the Prophet's Household contrary to assertions by distinguished commentators:

> ***"And they give food for love of Him to the poor, the orphan, and the captive"***
> ***"Your leader is Allah and His Messenger and those who believe, who say prayers and pay the poor-due while bowing down in prayer"*** [52]

The consensus among commentators was that the latter was revealed on the occasion of Ali's giving his ring to a beggar while bowing in prayer.

Ibn Taimiyyah, however, refused to accept this and every Prophetic tradition concerning the high status of Ali such as the fact, confirmed by all biographers, of the Prophet's choice of Ali as his brother [53]. On this historical event Ibn Taimiyyah commented: "The Prophet never took Ali to be his brother" [54]. Similarly, and without paying heed to irrefutable evidence to the contrary, he dismissed as false all accounts of Ali's virtues.

His criticism of the Prophet's Household:

Ibn Taimiyyah not only defended enemies of the Prophet's Household, rejected the exalted position of this Household but also criticised them with a passion typical of their strongest opponent. First, he disallowed any benefit or blessing derived through the Prophet's Household by declaring that "no benefit or blessing accrued from them" [55]. This viewpoint diametrically contradicted the Prophet's commandment [56]:

> I am leaving with you what if you hold fast to shall not be led astray: Allah's Book and my descendant, my Household. The two will be inseparable until they come to me at the Pool (in Paradise).

And the similar commandment [57]:

> I am leaving with you the Thaqalayn (two great things). The first is Allah's Book which contains enlightenment…and my Household. I remind you of them by Allah – and he repeated these last words three times.

Ibn Taimiyyah, however, interpreted these texts to suit his ends [58]:

> The (Prophet's) saying reported by Muslim – if it is authentic – includes nothing but a commandment to obey the Qur'an. He did not command his Household be followed since he said: I remind you of my Household by Allah.

As can be seen, Ibn Taimiyyah intentionally neglected that the Prophet also called his Household as 'the great thing'.

Ibn Taimiyyah was also fond of repeating the unproven account of Ali's engagement to Abi Jahl's daughter while Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, was still his wife. It has been established that this story was invented by Al-Musawar Ibn Mukhra'ma and Al-Karabisi who were known for their animosity toward Ali and exaltation of his enemies [59]. Al-Musawar Ibn Mukhra'ma used to ask for blessing on Muawiya whenever he mentioned his name. Nevertheless, he also became an ally of Al-Khawarij who opposed both Muawiya and Ali. They often met with him to listen to his discourses and generally considered him to be one of their leaders [60]. Ibn Taimiyyah's endorsement of their false allegations against Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib serves only to demonstrate his deep-seated hatred of the Imam.

He exposed this hatred again when he wrote the following on the subject of Ali's war [61]:

Ali fought to subjugate people and not make them obedient to Allah… Whoever criticised Muawiya for being an aggressor could be countered by Ali's opponents that Ali was also an aggressor and an unjust person who fought people into obedience…since whoever kills people to establish his rule seeks corruption and high status for himself, and this was Pharaoh's character. Allah says in his book: 'That final abode (Paradise) we allot for those who seek neither high status on earth nor corruption'.

Ibn Taimiyyah persistently pursued this anti Ali line in his book, *Minhaj Al-Sunna*, in contrary to authentic statements by the Prophet describing Ali's wars as just and commanding Muslims to support him as the following tradition indicates [62]:

> The Prophet said: One of you will fight for the cause of interpreting the Qur'an as I fought to defend it. His companions, including Abu Bakr and Omar approached him. Abu Bakr said: Is it I? The Prophet replied: No! Omar also asked: Is it I? And the Prophet said: No. It shall be the one who mends my slipper… Ali used to do this. Abu Saeed Al-Khudari said: We went to Ali and told him but he (acted) as if he had already heard it from the Prophet.

Ibn Taimiyyah, however, rejected this tradition as well as the Prophet's address of Ali, Fatima and their sons Al-Hassan and Al-Hussain [63]: "I am in war with whomever you fight and in peace with whomever you make peace with". Typically, he provided no evidence in support of this viewpoint which remains a mere allegation motivated by his personal biases [64].

With regard to Ali's religious knowledge, Ibn Taimiyyah put him in a rank below that of a theology student. He claimed that none of the four (Sunni) Imams or other distinguished jurists took his religious knowledge from Ali's since Malik studied with Al-Medina's jurists who almost never refer to Ali and Abu Hanifa, Al-Shafi'I and Ahmed replied on the teachings of Ibn Abbas who was an independent scholar and did not endorse Ali's views [65].

This is an extremely biased and incorrect statement. To disprove it, it is sufficient to mention that one of those four senior Sunni Imams, namely Al-Shafi'i, wrote a book to demonstrate that all religious knowledge originated with Ali and Ibn Abbas.

Furthermore, Ibn Abbas was reported by Ibn Qudama' in *Al-Mug'ni* to have said: "When we knew for certain Ali's view on an issue we never accepted another view from anyone else". Ibn Abbas was also quoted on Ali's religious knowledge: "Ali was granted nine-tenths of all religious knowledge and he is the most knowledgeable person about the remaining tenth" [66].

Finally, in pursuit of his persistent campaign against the Prophet's Household, he tried to discredit Al-Hussain's movement against Yazeed by writing [67]:

> (Al-Hussain's action) represented a bad judgement whose disadvantages were greater than its advantages. Almost always, any movement by a person against a ruler produces more evil than good.

Obviously, Ibn Taimiyyah considered all those who fought tyranny and injustice to be evil-doers who, instead, must accept unjust rulers and submit to their authority. His motives for adopting such a standpoint were aptly explained by Al-Aq'ad [68]:

> To proclaim that Al-Hussain was right constitutes an admission that the (Ummayid) state was at fault. And finding justification for Al-Hussain's (action) implies that Yazeed was guilty. And it is clear to all how moral principles are put aside…in order to prove the infallibility of an incumbent ruler and the guilt of a previous one.

But what kind of justification can Ibn Taimiyyah find for Yazeed's killing of Al-Hussain [69]:

> Yazeed is not more guilty that the Jews. The Jews killed some of their Prophets and killing Al-Hussain can not be more serious than killing Prophets.

In effect, this statement constituted a clear indictment of Yazeed's guilt, and Ibn Taimiyyah' lack of objectivity.

5
Ibn Taimiyyah and religious scholars

Ibn Taimiyyah was known for his harsh and abusive language in dealing with his opponents. He often described those who disagreed with him as liars, virtueless and ignorant [70]. His impoliteness is clearly illustrated by calling another religious scholar 'a donkey' because he contradicted him on a religious issue [71].

He openly abused a number of distinguished scholars such as Ibn Arabi, Al-Fif Al-Tilmisani, Imam Al-Ghazali and Al-Fakhr Al-Razi whom he scornfully called 'the chicks of the Indians and the Greek – in reference to their knowledge of the ancient civilisations. And whenever the scholar Ibn Al-Mutahar Al-Hilli was mention, he called him 'Ibn Al-Munajas' instead. He also used a derogatory name for the philosopher Dabiran [72]. These are only a few examples of Ibn Taimiyyah's style in dealing with other scholars.

6
Ibn Taimiyyah and the Yazeedis

Ibn Taimiyyah's standpoints on the Yazeedis raise serious doubts on his faith and beliefs. The Yazeedis exalted Yazeed Ibn Muawiya and their leader Udai Ibn Musafir above the status of ordinary human beings. Accordingly they were considered *ghulat* or extremists whom Muslims unanimously judged to be heretics because they bestowed divine attributes on human beings. This group was also known as the Adawia, after their leader Udai Ibn Musafir.

Ibn Taimiyyah who was a contemporary of this group wrote them a letter in which he addressed them in a manner unlike his typical style in dealing with his opponents and followers of other sects or deviant groups, or those whom he considered to be as such. He began his letter as follows [73]:

> From Ahmed Ibn Taimiyyah to whoever receives this letter of the Muslims who belongs to the Sunna and Jama' and follow the knowledgeable, blessed and exemplary Shaikh Udai Ibn Musafir Al-Umawi…May Allah lead them to follow His path. Peace upon you and Allah's mercy and blessing.

It is pertinent to wonder why Ibn Taimiyyah who scorned the Prophet's Household and criticised distinguished scholars like Al-Razi, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) calling them the 'offspring' of the Indians and the Greek and more ignorant than Jews and Christians, addressed this group of extremists amicably – unless their exaltation of Yazeed Ibn Muawiya was regarded by him as proof of their adherence to the Sunna. One can then understand why Ibn Taimiyyah did not conform to the teachings of Ahmed Ibn Hanbal who said: "Can anyone who believes in Allah and the Judgement Day love Yazeed?"

7
What religious scholars thought of Ibn Taimiyyah

After reviewing Ibn Taimiyyah's beliefs we turn now to religious scholars' views and evaluation of his beliefs. Al-Hafidh Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani summarised these views as follows [74]:

> People differed on (Ibn Taimiyyah). Some considered him to be one of those who believed that Allah has physical attributes because he wrote that 'the hand, the feet, leg and face are real features and that Allah sits on the throne'.
> Another group judged him to be a heretic because he claimed that the Prophet should not be asked for intercession.
> A third group said he was a hypocrite because of what he wrote on Ali and that he was helpless in all his endeavours, and that he tried several times to become a Caliph without success and that he fought for the sake of governing and not religion. He also said that Ali loved governing while Othman loved money. And finally he said that Ali converted to Islam when he was a boy and hence his fait is questionable and also reported the alleged engagement of Ali to Abi Jahl's daughter. For all these verbal attacks on Ali he was judged a heretic in conformity with the authentic statement of the Prophet on Ali that 'whoever hates you is a hypocrite'.

Ibn Hajar in *Al-Fatawa Al-Haditha* wrote the following assessment of Ibn Taimiyyah [75]:

> Ibn Taimiyyah is a man forsaken by Allah, a misguided, blinded, deafened and humiliated (person). This was the consensus of religious leaders who exposed his deviant ways and untrue words. Whoever wants to ascertain this should read what the learned Imam Abi Al-Hassan Al-Sibki, his son Al-Taj, Imam Al-Iz Ibn Jama' and others of the Shafi', Maliki and Hanafi schools wrote (on him). The gist of it is that his opinions are worthless… and that he stands accused of corrupting religion and misleading others and that he was an extremist. May Allah bring him to His justice and protect us from his ideas and deeds.

Ibn Taimiyyah's character and views are also aptly described in a personal letter addressed to him by Al-Thahabi in which he advised, preached and rebuked him. Excerpts of this letter follow [76]:

> I thank Allah for my humble position. My Lord have mercy on me, help me to rectify my misdeeds and safeguard my faith. I am saddened by the state of Al-Sunna and its followers and long for faithful brothers who will share my grief. I feel sorry for the loss of people who were the lanterns of knowledge, the kindred of piety and the treasures of benevolence. O to have a coin earned righteously and a true friend. Envy the one who is too preoccupied with his own failings to notice others' and woe to the one who is too preoccupied with others' failings to see his own. Till when do you observe the dirt in your friend's eyes and forget the grit in yours? Till when shall you praise yourself, your discourses and words and criticise scholars and search for other people's faults? – In spite of the Prophet's command: 'Remember only the good deeds of your dead because they

have gone to (where they shall meet) what they have done'. I know that you defend your opinion by saying: These criticisms are directed to those who never knew Islam, and did not know what the Prophet advanced and such (criticism) is a holy task. On the contrary, they knew a lot of good things, which, if adhered to, would lead to success and they ignored many things which did not concern them. And it is a sign of a Muslim's good faith to ignore what does not concern him.

I beseech you by Allah to let us be for you are an argumentative and talkative person who never rests or sleeps. Avoid committing errors in religion… Your Prophet said: 'I fear most for my nation every talkative hypocrite…' Till when shall you dig up minute philosophical heresies..? We long for a meeting in which pious men are remembered because when these are mentioned we earn Allah's mercy.

How misfortunate is the one who follows you for he is prone to heresy especially if he has a meagre knowledge of religion. He pretends to be your ally while in truth he is your enemy. Aren't all your followers feeble-minded incapable persons, liars or devious persons…? If you don't believe me then check and evaluate them impartially. Till when shall you, Muslim, befriend yourself and oppose the good? Befriend it and despise the pious? Exalt it and scorn the ascetic? And till when shall you praise your words as much as you praise authentic sayings of the Prophet? I wish that these sayings were safe from you because you never cease to attack them by labelling them as weak or unauthentic or by rejecting them or misinterpreting them. Isn't it time for you to behave correctly, to repent and conform? Aren't you in your seventies and may soon leave this world? By Allah, I don't remember you ever mentioning death. On the contrary, you despise anyone who does so.

I think that you will not welcome my words nor listen to my advice and that you will write volumes to refute this letter and persist till I surrender. If this is the opinion of someone who cherishes you then I wonder what your enemies think of you. And your enemies, I swear, include pious and reasonable men just as your friends include liars and ignorant persons. I give you my consent to curse me in public and to benefit of my letter in private – Allah have mercy on those who show me my faults because I have many failings and faults. Woe to me if I do not repent because Allah knows them. My only balsam is Allah's forgiveness and guidance. Allah, Lord of the world, be praised and His blessings on Muhammad, the seal of the Prophets and all his Household and Companions.

This is what one eminent religious scholar had to say to Ibn Taimiyyah whom the Wahhabi movement chose as their Imam or spiritual leader by adhering to his deviant ideas and beliefs.

Some of those who preach a return to the original Islamic way of life are also applauding Ibn Taimiyyah and his ideas. They strive to cover up his misleading beliefs by simply ignoring them or omitting them but this may prove to be an impossible task since these constitute more than three-quarters of his books and articles. These misguided people and their efforts have been aptly described in the Qur'an as follows: "They think they can deceive Allah and the believers, but they only deceive themselves save they know not".

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